

LECTURE

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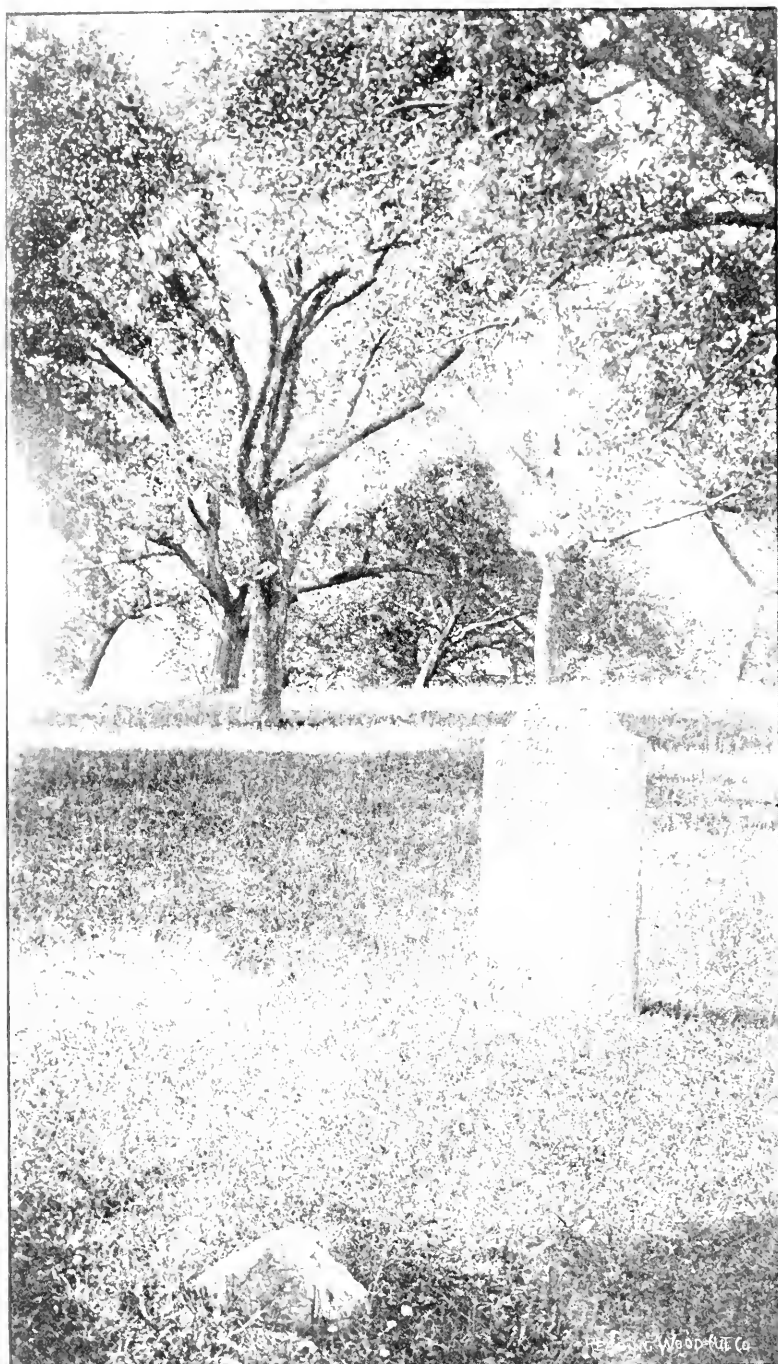
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BY

JOHN B. BROWN, President, New York and



GRAVE OF CONRAD WEISER
near Womelsdorf, Berks County, Pa. as it appeared in June, 1893

LECTURE
ON THE
LIFE AND TIMES
OF
CONRAD WEISER,
THE
FIRST REPRESENTATIVE MAN
OF
BERKS COUNTY,
BY
MORTON L. MONTGOMERY.



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PURPOSE OF LECTURE.

5.11.14
The tendency of the times for some years has been against the uniform development of the districts that constitute larger divisions of territory, as counties and States. Like the draining waters of creeks and rivers into the ocean without artificial impediments—as in the primeval period when mechanical power was not demanded—industries, wealth and population have been drifting, or rather drawn, towards great centres such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis and San Francisco. It is even to be noticed in inland counties like Berks, Lebanon and Lehigh, for the county-seats are growing so rapidly that they are coming to have the major part of assessed property and population, notwithstanding the area of territory occupied is comparatively limited. Political and social influences are thereby developed in channels leading to personal distinction rather than general welfare. In this way too much power is permitted to settle gradually but surely in certain persons, and their individual judgment is taken as public opinion. This is against the substantial interests and prosperity of the people taken as an organized body.

General education and government have been carried on for many years by a prescribed system for the general advantage of all the inhabitants. The manifest design of this legislation was to build up the parts which constitute the whole, on the theory that if the several parts be recognized for intelligence and self-government the whole must necessarily be distinguished in these respects. But with all our State and local appropriations for the purposes of education and government, many parts are found to be deteriorating while only few are improving. This is particularly noticeable in respect to property, population and social influence; and in respect to individuality, co-operation, confidence and reliability, the average development is not what we have a right to expect in return for the taxes levied and expenditures made. Electors contribute their share of the taxes to enable the several parts or districts to be successfully maintained and developed, but the substantial and uniform local benefits for which the taxes are assented to without complaint are not realized.

Steam and electricity have latterly become so important in the development of industry for the superfluities of life, and capital and speculation have concentrated so largely in metropolitan

places, from which they exert a most extraordinary influence over the manners, customs and desires of society, reaching out hundreds if not thousands of miles, that little hope can be entertained of effecting a change by the discussion of local rights in the interior parts of Pennsylvania along the mountains. I mean such a change as would give to labor a due proportion of its products in the districts where it is carried on.

The waters rise not in the mountains simply to flow on to the sea without advantage to the people as they pass, nor are men and women intended to establish domestic relations in the interior parts simply to permit their offspring to be drawn away to swell the population of great cities, nor are they expected to work and practice rigid economy simply to give the real benefits to financiers and speculators far removed from the seat of industry; but they are designed to serve a more direct purpose in the affairs of mankind. The natural results would be more advantageous to the locality if they were not commonly and persistently drawn away by selfish manipulations. A true conception of local rights would greatly modify these manipulations in such a manner as to encourage plans and schemes of distribution that would produce a uniform appreciation and development of the general rights, privileges and conveniences of the people. Circumstances, sometimes accidental but mostly the result of deliberation, may enable a man or body of men to take an unfair advantage over others, whether as neighbors of the same locality, or as fellow citizens of adjoining or distant localities, but in the short span of a life-time this advantage will be found to result eventually in a disadvantage of some kind, either of a personal or general nature.

Our education being intended for social elevation, and our government for political equality, the former should incline us to be just and fraternal, and the latter in all its departments to be impartial, whatsoever the situation of the several localities. But my historical researches, with a collection of statistics, have brought me to see an opposite social and political tendency, and believing it to be injurious to the general welfare, I was led to study the career of CONRAD WEISER—a most zealous advocate of local rights—and to present the result of my reflections to the people in the form of a lecture, with the hope that thereby public attention would be directed to the rights and demands of the respective parts of Berks County, and that this tendency might be changed in the interest of practical not theoretical political equality, of general not individual industrial power, and of real not imaginary social progress.

MORTON L. MONTGOMERY.

LIFE AND TIMES OF CONRAD WEISER.

Lecture delivered extemporaneously before local teachers' institutes in Berks County during 1892 and 1893 by Morton L. Montgomery, Esq., and as read by him before the Board of Trade of Reading at a regular meeting on June 1, 1893.

BIOGRAPHY is an important study. The actions and accomplishments of prominent men who have been identified with the development of a community, or with the social movements of a State or Nation, form the basis of history, and a precise story of them, whether written or spoken, is not only very pleasing but highly entertaining and instructive.

Men and women of distinction in different periods of history have been selected by writers and orators upon whom to base biography and oration. The practice has been carried on from the beginning of speech and literature until now, and it will continue until mankind and language shall have passed away.

It is common for the lecturer and the orator to select a prominent character who lived in a distant land many years ago, and filled an important position in political, or religious, or industrial affairs, and so directed his actions as to have brought about change, revolution or death in the affairs of man.

In the case of Conrad Weiser, I have left the usual path. I have remained here in the county of Berks for my subject. And what have I found? A hero—a conqueror—a genius? I have found a man who was more than a hero of battles—a leader who was more than a conqueror of nations—a guide who was more than a genius in understanding and controlling the mysteries of the world. He was born at a time when the rulers of political and religious affairs in Western Europe directed all their energy against the natural development of the people, and regarded their own aggrandizement of more importance than the general welfare; and he was brought up under the terrors of invasion, the horrors of carnage, and the discouragements of impending devastation and death. These were influences that were sufficient to exhaust his vitality, crush his hopes, and blast his ambition; but he survived them all and became, under the Providence of God, a man of high impulses, passing away eventually with a record of noble deeds in the interest of peace and progress, just after the County of Berks had been organized as an important factor in the annals of Pennsylvania.

PALATINATE AND PENNSYLVANIA COMPARED IN THE 17TH
CENTURY.

Condition of the Palatinate—During the 17th century the inhabitants of Germany, especially along the borders of France and Switzerland, suffered persecution, losses and death beyond description. We can hardly believe it possible that the rulers, professing openly the doctrines of the Christian religion, were so extremely cruel to their fellow-beings as to be without charity or

forbearance. The losses which they occasioned to life and property cannot be estimated—the number of lives running into hundreds of thousands, and the value of property into millions of dollars. It can readily be imagined that the condition of the people was truly intolerable; and being unable to remedy the wrongs and outrages that were repeatedly perpetrated upon them, whether by appeals to the government, or by fervent prayers to God, they had only one avenue of escape, short of death, and that was by emigration.

Character of People.—The Palatinates were good people and experienced workmen in all kinds of trades and occupations. By their labor and skill they had in various ways improved the value of the several sections where they resided, and their productions yielded directly and indirectly great revenues to the Government and the Church. One would suppose that they might be detained and preserved on this account if on no other, and that every inducement might be held out to persuade them to remain and multiply their families and their possessions. But nothing could hold them. The spirit of emigration had seized them and it swept them from their native hills and valleys by the thousand.

Edict of Nantes.—In eastern France the movement began about 1666. At that time there were two million Huguenots, and they constituted some of the best and most thrifty people in the country. But during the next fifty years fully one-half were forced to abandon their homes. This was caused by the persecutions growing out of the Edict of Nantes which was issued in 1598 by King Henry IV of France. This Edict was issued apparently to favor the followers of Calvin, but finding their hopes for dominion and equality not realized, they showed dissatisfaction with its provisions,

and then the King revoked it to reduce them to nothing. The force and influence of these persecutions extended across the borders of France, through Alsace and Lorraine into and beyond the Palatinate. The people throughout the territory on both sides of the Rhine for miles came to be influenced by a common impulse for religious toleration and personal freedom. So strong was the feeling that 30,000 inhabitants emigrated in a body. At different times from 1688 to 1707, the French entered Wurtemberg and annihilated whole towns and villages with fire and sword. Where they found an improved country, possessed by a thriving people, they left abandoned valleys with death and destruction in their tracks.

Condition of Pennsylvania.—Three thousand miles to the west, across the Atlantic Ocean, in a stretch of primeval country along the Delaware, about a hundred miles from the sea, (then commonly known as New Sweden, and subsequently called Pennsylvania) the condition of the inhabitants and their prospects were just the opposite of those in the Palatinate. They had no persecutions to bear, and were permitted to exercise religious freedom according to the dictates of their own consciences. They were encouraged to establish settlements, and do all they could towards permanent improvements. A spirit of peace prevailed, excepting such social and political disturbances as were incident to the change of government from the Swedes to the Dutch, and from the Dutch to the English, for a period of thirty years. There was no edict over them from ruler or priest, indeed, not even a dread of political provisions or religious persecutions of any kind. They were expected to labor, make themselves useful, and develop the natural resources of the country. This

they did with remarkable courage and energy, and as a natural consequence their population and possessions multiplied rapidly.

While the Edict of Nantes was operating directly and indirectly to crush the spirits of the German people along the Rhine, the Swedes, Dutch and English were building up promising settlements along the Delaware; and by the time that the Edict was revoked in 1685, William Penn had come to own the Province of Pennsylvania, and to establish a liberal form of government for the regulation of its affairs. The contrast accordingly, between the condition of things then along the Rhine and that along the Delaware was wonderful,

Superior Destiny of Emigrants.—Hence the destiny of the two locations under widely different influences during the succeeding century carried the people here to results far superior to those in the Palatinate. The grandchildren of those that remained there were still under the same form of government with no rights or privileges in directing or controlling the course of events; but the grandchildren of those that left found themselves free agents, constituting the very foundation of representative government. There the people occupied the land, but they possessed no rights of person or property which the rulers or priests were bound to respect. Here the Indians, as the first occupants, enjoyed certain vested rights. These William Penn respected, notwithstanding a comprehensive charter to him from King Charles the Second of England, and he taught all men to practice the sublime precept of doing unto others as they would be done by.

In the midst of the enervating condition of the Palatinates just described on the one hand, and while the emigrants to Pennsylvania were being inspired with

the prospects of peace, equality, justice and freedom on the other, the subject of our remarks dawns in the history of passing events.

BOYHOOD OF CONRAD WEISER FROM 1696 TO 1717.

Birth and Parentage.—Conrad Weiser was born November 2, 1696, in the Duchy of Wurtemberg, at a village called Affstaedt, in the County of Herrenberg. Now, nearly two hundred years afterward, Affstaedt is still a village with a population numbering about 450; the county 35,000, and the Duchy (similar to our State) about 2,000,000.

His parents and grandparents lived there during the devastating wars and persecutions of the 17th century. For generations they bore exactions and sufferings of various kinds without flinching. They had a natural love for their homes along and in the vicinity of the Rhine, and through its influence they held on with matchless devotion and indescribable heroism. All the surrounding features were dear to them—the buildings where they were born and reared—the valleys and hills where they labored and obtained sustenance—the churches and schools where they were educated and brought from fear, darkness and ignorance into hope, light and knowledge.

Faith of Progenitors.—With associations such as these, in spite of discouragements and losses, even death, they could not entertain thoughts of leaving. The faculty of faith was developed in them to an unusual degree, and their feelings created physical conditions and spiritual sentiments which were transmitted to succeeding generations. We can therefore say that Conrad Weiser

possessed these conditions and sentiments by inheritance, and that he grew up with them as his progenitors had grown up before him.

Sentiment for Liberty.—During his infancy and early youth the social customs and practices of his parents still prevailed. There was apparently no progress in these respects. In that period of his life he was what they had been in a similar period. But if there was no change in the customs or practices, there had come to be a change in the sentiments of the people in reference to the enjoyment of life, of liberty and of property. With persecutions continuing and no redress promised or hoped for, the people in and about the Palatinate were at last found moving in the direction of the flowing waters of the Rhine to the North Sea.

The benevolent spirit of Queen Anne of England had created in their hearts a desire for personal freedom and religious toleration, and the kindred spirit of William Penn had also inclined them to consider his generous offers of land in the Province of Pennsylvania. Thousands and tens of thousands of the friends, neighbors and countrymen of Conrad Weiser's father were in the great social movement of emigration, and in this movement by the year 1709, his father had also determined to follow.

Emigration in 1709.—We may well wonder how he came to survive the cruel invasions of the French, and their costly devastations and persecutions. By his influence, he collected a colony of 4000 Germans from the vicinity of Gross Anspach, and, in June, with his family (comprising eight children and himself,) he led this colony away from the terrors of war into the blessings of peace. In this family was Conrad Weiser, then nearly thirteen years of age.

So it was that these Christian, hopeful, determined people left the Palatinate, first following the Rhine, then crossing the lower North Sea and landing in England along the Thames river near London, after a trying journey of two months. Transportation not having been immediately provided, they were detained until the necessary preparations could be made for so large a body of emigrants at one time. While thus waiting, there were five chiefs of the Mohawk tribe at London on a visit to the Queen, and they, hearing of the Palatinates, volunteered to set apart certain lands in the Mohawk Valley in New York, if the Queen should direct them to be taken thither. Their detention having been quite expensive to the Queen, she willingly accepted the proposition, and about Christmas, 1709, hired ten ships to carry them across the wide expanse of waters to their destination.

Landed at New York.—After a long and perilous voyage, they reached New York on June 17, 1710, whence they were taken up the Hudson River to a point at and about what is now known as Newberg. They believed that this was the place to which they had been kindly invited by the Mohawk chiefs; but it was not. In reality there were seven settlements, and each settlement was under the control of a commissioner who was appointed by the Governor of New York. In that locality, still seventy-five miles from the Mohawk Valley, this hopeful colony of Palatinates was set to burning tar and cultivating hemp under the belief that they were working for themselves.

Impositions on Palatinates.—After the lapse of several years, and after the lands had begun to show marked improvement, they discovered however that their pos-

sessions and earnings were claimed and appropriated towards satisfying the expenses incurred in carrying them across the sea; and learning for the first time that they had been deceived and that they were employed as slaves, they raised loud complaints. In doing so, they were urged by strong reasons; for they had been told that their passage was to be free of expense to them, and that the lands which they were directed to occupy were to be a gift or grant without cost of any kind. Having from the start been under the general guidance and protection of Conrad Weiser's father, they naturally looked to him with confidence for their rescue. And they did not look in vain.

Settlement in Schoharie.—In the Spring of 1713, they sent seven deputies, under the lead of Conrad's father, to the Mohawk Indians, to ascertain if they would not be permitted to settle on lands at and about Schoharie—a place situated some forty miles to the west of Albany. While the negotiations were going on, the colonists appeared, so eager were they to get beyond the reach of the grasping commissioners. In the following November, the Indians executed a release of their interests in certain lands for the sum of \$300, and one hundred and fifty German families settled in that famous valley. Being industrious, economical and persevering, they, in a few years, succeeded in building up prosperous villages, which came to be named after their leaders, as Weisersdorf, Brunnensdorf, Gerlachsdorf, Hartmansdorf and Schmidtsdorf. The progeny of these German emigrants afterward adopted the same custom in Berks County, for towns came to be laid out in the Tulpehoeken Valley and similarly named, as Womelsdorf, Stouchsburg, Wohleberstown, Strausstown, Rehrersburg and Schaefferstown.

Life with the Indians.—In the negotiations for the land, Conrad's father made the acquaintance of an Indian chief, named Quagnant, and after his family had settled there the chief made a visit to him. During this visit the chief manifested a fondness for Conrad which led him to ask Conrad's father to permit the son to accompany him to his village. About the beginning of Winter in 1713, when seventeen years old, at his father's request, Conrad accompanied the Indian chief, and these are his own words in describing his experience :

"I endured a great deal of cold in my situation, and by Spring my hunger far surpassed the cold, although I had poor clothing. The Indians were often so intoxicated that for fear of being murdered I hid myself among the bushes. During the latter end of July, I returned to father from my Indian home. I had acquired a tolerable beginning, and, in fact, understood the greater part of the Maqua tongue."

This was certainly a most wonderful experience, and he must have possessed more than an ordinary share of courage, good sense and forbearance, otherwise he could not have remained through the Winter and Spring, (the most trying seasons of the year) with a race of people so entirely different from the Germans. Amongst them he was commonly known by the name of Tarachawagon.

First Experience as Interpreter.—In this short time Conrad came to understand the Indians thoroughly, and after returning home, his ability was called into use as interpreter and preserver of the peace. He describes his introductory efforts as follows :

"About one English mile from my father's dwelling, a few families of the Maqua tribe resided, and a number of that Nation often passed to and fro on their hunting expeditions. It frequently happened that disputes arose between the high-mettled Germans and members of that tawny Nation. On such occasions I was immediately sent for, to interpret for both parties. I had a good deal of business but no pay. None of my people understood their language, excepting myself, and by exertion I became perfect, considering my age and circumstances."

With an apparent aptitude for an undertaking of such a delicate nature, it was natural for Conrad Weiser to show his usefulness in a public way, and to extend his influence from a small community throughout the inhabited portions of the country, reaching from the St. Lawrence River to and beyond the Potomac, a distance of a thousand miles.

Successful Foot-race.—After his return, some time in August, 1714, the Indians arranged to have a foot-race with the Germans and offered to stake on the issue a lot of dressed deer-skins against some articles which the Germans possessed. The challenge was accepted and both parties assembled at Weisersdorf to witness the race. The runner for the Indians was a young man, recognized as the most agile of all the tribe, and for the Germans Conrad Weiser was selected. The starting point was in the road just above the village, and the goal was a little beyond the most southern dwelling. The intervening distance was about half a mile in length.

At a given signal the runners started and onward they dashed with the fleetness of antelopes. Towards the end they were obliged to turn a corner at the dwelling, and reaching this point side by side they ran against each other with such force that the Indian struck the building and fell. And so Conrad won the race.

Employed at Farming and Teaching.—His general employment was at farming in the Schoharie Valley, under his father; but during the Winter he was also engaged at teaching. Labor was the most prominent idea before the people in that period, and thereby they created value and improved the surrounding lands from a barren waste and wilderness into profitable gardens and farms; and from caves and tents their habitations

advanced into buildings, and from the rocks and trees that first sheltered domestic animals there came into use strong and commodious barns.

Palatinates Disturbed.—This general improvement of the country thereabout had been going on rapidly for about six years. But in the midst of their encouraging labors, certain men came upon the lands, claimed them by right of previous purchase from the Governor, and demanded that the occupants either buy them or yield up possession. This was not only a surprise, but on that account “a great uproar arose both at Schoharie and Albany.” Earnest pleadings and entreaties were of no avail. The landlords were unscrupulous and insisted upon their demands. To them, what was the Queen’s favor or the Indians’ generous release as against their alleged vested rights, especially if by presumption, fraud and threats they could acquire improvements that did not cost them any labor or expense?

Delegates for Redress.—Being peaceably inclined, the Palatinates determined to send delegates to the beloved Queen Anne for redress. They accordingly selected three representative men, one of whom was Conrad’s father. The delegates departed secretly at the expense of the Colony, but they had not gone far on their journey before they were arrested on false charges by the landlords. After severe trials they finally reached London, but found the Queen dead; and, to add to their distress, agents of the landlords, anticipating their arrival, again caused them to be imprisoned on wicked misrepresentations. The poor, dejected delegates wrote for aid but their letters were intercepted. They persisted, nevertheless, and eventually obtained money for their redemption. The sum necessary to purchase their release amounted to £70, which, in that day, represented much labor and economy.

Other Lands Offered.—The situation of affairs in the Schoharie Valley was presented so well to the “Commissioners of Trade and Plantations” that Robert Hunter was recalled and William Burnet was substituted as Governor, to whom an order was issued—“to grant vacant lands to all the Germans who had been sent to New York by the deceased Queen Anne.” Conrad Weiser’s father returned to Schoharie in 1723, after an absence of four years, but he and those about him could not retain the lands they had improved except by purchasing them at exorbitant prices, which they could not afford, and, believing that they could not with certainty retain other vacant lands in that vicinity even if they should take possession and improve them as they had done twice before, certain families united with him in determining to make another removal.

First Palatinates in Tulpehocken.—For ten years they had heard of the liberal grants in Pennsylvania to emigrants, and thither they directed their way. Sixty families joined together in forming a colony. After cutting open a road from Schoharie to the headwaters of the Susquehanna, a distance of twenty miles, they proceeded by rafts and boats on this river for over two hundred miles to the outlet of the Swatara creek, and then pursued their journey along and beyond this stream until they reached the territory where the Tulpehocken creek takes its rise. Through an unbroken wilderness they continued for some miles farther, and finding at last a country that suited them in every way they halted; and there, in 1723, amongst the Indians, they established the first white settlement beyond the South Mountain, which, shortly afterward, came to be known as Tulpehocken.

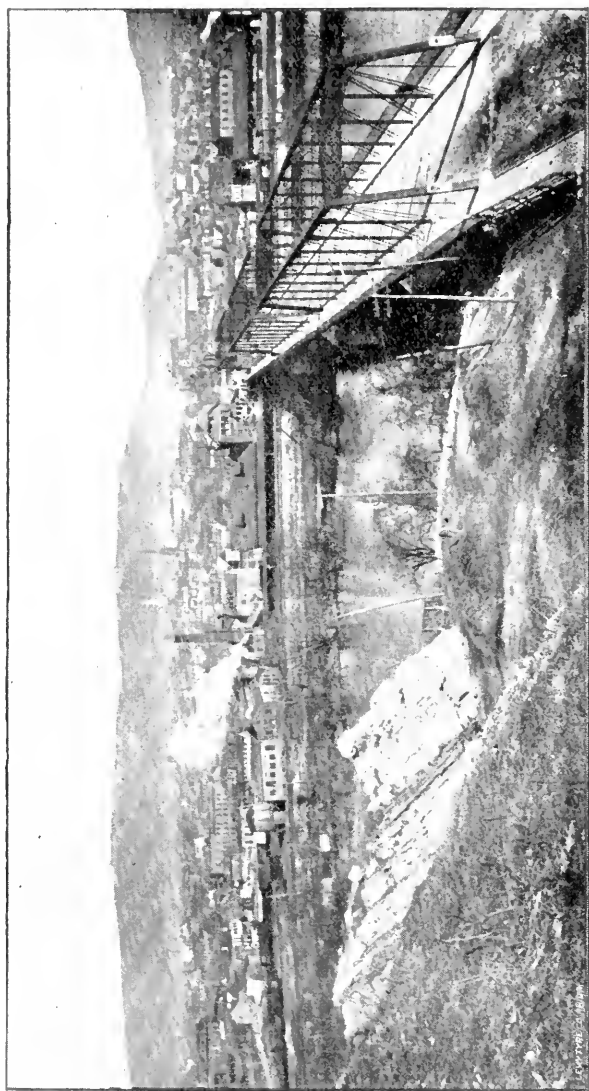
MANHOOD OF CONRAD WEISER FROM 1718 TO 1760.

While the improvement of Schoharie Valley was going on successfully, Conrad Weiser became of age, and, strange to say, while he was entering upon the real trials and responsibilities of life, William Penn was passing away from them. By that time, he had grown to be a practical farmer, and he had acquired an easy familiarity with the English and Indian languages—the former by teaching and the latter by association with the Indians.

Married in 1720.—In 1720 he married a young woman of that vicinity. It has been said that he selected for his wife a young squaw who was a daughter of one of the Indian chiefs whom he knew very intimately; but it is generally believed that she was a German who came along from the Palatinate in the emigrating colony under the guidance of his father. Whether an Indian or a German, she was a faithful wife, and a most devoted mother of fourteen children, seven of whom survived their parents.

Migration to Tulpehocken.—He continued his employments as a farmer and a teacher, and also acted occasionally as an interpreter in the Schoharie Valley until 1729 when he too concluded to settle in the vicinity of his father. This exhibits a strong attachment that must have existed between his father and himself. His course in traveling thither was the same as that pursued by his father six years before.

Condition of Settlement.—The township of Tulpehocken was then a political division with a population not exceeding five hundred; and the County of Lancaster was created out of the upper section of Chester



VIEW OF READING FROM THE WEST.

The "Ford" across the Schuylkill, in the highway from Tulpehocken to Philadelphia, before Reading was laid out in 1748, was within one hundred feet to the right of or below the Penn Street Bridge. A ferry boat was used for many years until 1816; then the first covered wooden bridge became passable. A superior iron bridge was erected in 1884. Reading was incorporated as a city in 1847. Population in 1893 estimated 70,000.

County about the time of his arrival. There was only one church—which was situated near the Tulpehocken creek about two miles west from the place where he lived, and a highway extended from this church eastward to the Schuylkill, striking the ford where Reading was subsequently laid out in 1748. Farming was the principal occupation, and trading operations were carried on with merchants at Philadelphia sixty-five miles distant to the southeast. This was the situation of affairs in the settlement in 1729.

Influence with Indians.—The territory was still claimed by the Indians. His father's influence with them, and then his own, must have persuaded them not to cause any serious trouble beyond complaints to the Provincial Government. At that time he was thirty-three years old, in the very prime of life; and he was possessed of a varied experience which fitted him well to be what he afterward became, a leader in the Province until his death.

Visit of Shekallamy.—For a few years, Conrad Weiser led a quiet life at farming. While thus engaged, Shekallamy—a representative of the Iroquois Nation, who resided at Shamokin—called to see him while on his way to Philadelphia, having doubtless known him before in New York. Shekallamy persuaded him to go along and act as interpreter, which he consented to do. This was in 1731, and it was the first time that he acted in such a capacity in the Province. His services on that occasion were so highly appreciated that the Executive Council directed him to be paid, even though the services were rendered at the request of Shekallamy. Several months afterward, he again assisted in a treaty between the Shawnese Indians and the Provincial Government. From 1732 to 1736, the messengers of the

Iroquois passed repeatedly to and fro in order to bring the Treaty of 1732 to a successful conclusion, and the presence of Conrad Weiser was necessary at all the meetings. This Treaty related to the release of the territory that lay between the South and Blue Mountains, and extended from the Delaware River to the Susquehanna.

Provincial Interpreter—From that time his reputation as a reliable interpreter was established, and for twenty years afterward he was always found faithful and honest, speaking not his own words but the words of the Indians and the officials of the government. His reports of journeys to Shamokin, Easton, Onondago and Ohio, in reference to treaties, exhibit a high order of ability and a superior conception of honor and justice. During his missions as interpreter he frequently met Benjamin Franklin and enjoyed an intimate acquaintance with him. The course of his travels was always through a wilderness and extended from one hundred to five hundred miles, with no resting places on the way but Indian villages.

Here were indeed determination, courage and skill sufficient to distinguish him among the heroes of the world, not in the list of adventurers and speculators, but of benefactors to the human race. Brave deeds that are lauded most are commonly done in the company of other persons whose presence acts as an inspiration. This is especially the case in times of war. But in the case of Conrad Weiser, he went mostly alone, with nothing to inspire him but a sense of duty, and nothing to encourage him but his earnest hopes of establishing peaceful relations between the Indians and the settlers, and his confidence in the over-ruling Providence of God.

Local Government.—About the time that Conrad Weiser became publicly active as an interpreter, he also interested himself in the formation of a new township out of the extensive territory of Tulpehocken. It was erected in 1734 and named Heidelberg, after a prominent place in the Palatinate, in the Duchy of Baden.

In 1738 he was at the head of a movement for the erection of a new county out of the upper parts of Lancaster and Philadelphia Counties. Repeated and persistent applications to the General Assembly were made during the next fourteen years, and finally, in 1752, the prayer of the petitioners was granted. The name given to the new county was BERKS—this having been suggested by the Proprietaries in honor of their native county in England. Until that time only three German names had been given to townships in this district—Heidelberg, Bern, and Alsace. This arose from the fact that the Germans had no control over Provincial affairs. Besides being interested in the establishment of new political divisions for the rights and conveniences incident to local government, Conrad Weiser was concerned in the laying out of township roads to facilitate and encourage the intercourse of one community with another.

This devotion to local matters exhibits one of his best and strongest characteristics, and shows his high appreciation of the rights and duties of citizenship. I can safely say that without his energy in behalf of local rights, roads, and districts, the erection of Berks County would have been postponed for some years, possibly twenty, or even thirty years, owing to the intervening excitements that eventually culminated in the Revolution and in the establishment of free representative government; and also that, without his extensive personal knowledge of the country above the

South Mountain and between the Delaware and Susquehanna Rivers, the boundary lines of this county would not have been fixed in such an admirable manner, for the territory in respect to general topography, natural fertility, and the distribution of valleys and streams is without comparison of all the counties in Pennsylvania. His name was not mentioned in the Act of Assembly but his influence appeared there nevertheless. It was, no doubt, withheld for more honorable mention, for he was appointed as one of the first justices of the County Courts.

Missionaries Encouraged.—Conrad Weiser was a man of positive convictions. As such he manifested a natural zeal for religious and educational affairs in the Tulpehocken settlement immediately after his arrival, for he had been brought up under certain religious influences, and teaching had been part of his daily life for the preceding ten or fifteen years. He was a member of the Lutheran denomination.

In 1738 three Moravian missionaries came to this country in behalf of educating the Indians in the Christian religion. He extended a kind welcome to them, and accompanied them to Bethlehem. Several years afterward, in 1742, Count Zinzendorf also visited this section of the Province for the purpose of assisting the missionaries in their religious undertaking, first preaching for a while in Oley and then going to Tulpehocken. Weiser received him in a cordial manner and guided him thence through the wilderness to Shamokin.

Intimacy with Muhlenberg.—About that time Rev. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (regarded as the pioneer of the Lutheran Church in America) also arrived in Pennsylvania. In his ministrations for the Lutheran denomination he passed to and fro in the Tulpehocken and Heidelberg settlements, and intimate social rela-

tions with Conrad Weiser were a natural consequence. During his sojourns there he made the acquaintance of Weiser's eldest daughter, Maria, a young woman about seventeen years of age, and eventually married her in 1743.

In 1754 Weiser permitted his name to be used in connection with the German Calvinists (Reformed) at Reading. He may have been a member of this congregation since its organization in 1751. A patent was issued to him and Isaac Levan as trustees in trust for this congregation for the lot of ground at the corner of Thomas and Prince streets (now Washington and Sixth.)

Judicial Career.—In 1741, Conrad Weiser was appointed a Justice of the Peace. For this position he was fully qualified by education and experience. His father and also his grandfather had filled a similar office at Gross-Anspach in Wurtemberg. He continued to serve this position until the County of Berks was erected in 1752, when he was selected as one of the Justices of the County Courts. This appointment was a just recognition of his ability and integrity. He dispensed justice without fear or favor, and officiated as President of this local judicial body until he died.

On one occasion, it is stated, that he knew a litigating party to be "worse than any Indian or Frenchman;" nevertheless he conducted an impartial trial and pronounced the sentence of the Court. For this upright and fearless discharge of official duty he and his family came near losing their lives. On a certain night, shortly afterward, the shutters of his dwelling in Heidelberg were barred and the doors blockaded, and an effort was made to burn the house by placing straw and other combustible materials around on the outside and setting them on fire. Fortunately, one of the children

discovered the attempt in time and gave the alarm, when all of the family escaped.

And it is also related, as showing his humor, that a woman annoyed him by frequent arrests of her husband for assault and battery, and, upon asking her if she did not sometimes deserve a little castigation, she replied, after some hesitation, that it was the husband's right and her profit but that he exercised the right too often and was too severe.

Indian Incursions—The French and Indian War was a prominent factor in Colonial matters from 1754 to 1763, more especially to 1758. The Indians had previously been led by misrepresentations of the French to believe that the Penns had cheated them out of their lands, and on this account they determined to take revenge on the innocent settlers in the districts near the Blue Mountains. Their incursions were delayed until 1754, then they began to visit the inhabitants with outrages that were truly shocking. They applied the knife, tomahawk, and torch at every opportunity, scalping or killing men, women and children, and burning down dwellings and barns. Their cruelties cannot be described nor the losses estimated. Their evil spirits had been thoroughly aroused, and nothing apparently would or could satisfy them short of blood, destruction and death. We cannot imagine the condition of the people during that trying and uncertain period, especially those along and in the vicinity of the mountains, for it was terrible beyond description.

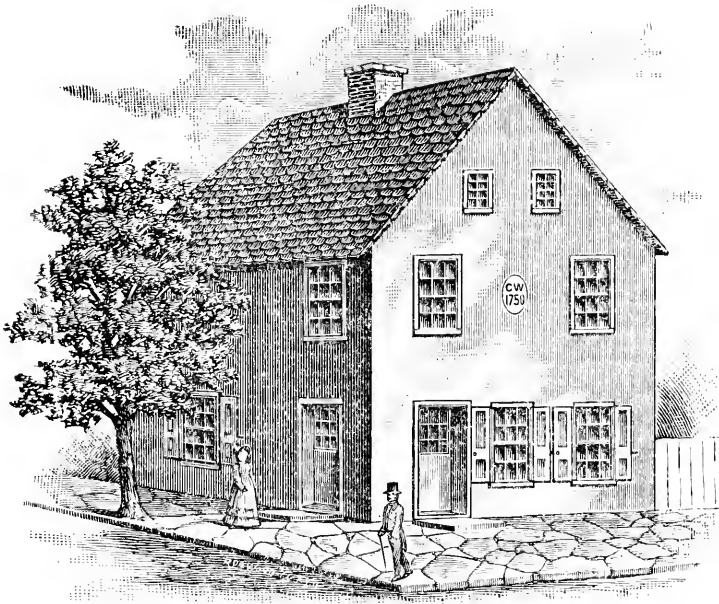
Military Prominence—During those fearful and costly years, Conrad Weiser occupied a prominent position in the military affairs of the Province. He was commissioned as a colonel, and as such officer he took charge of the troops in this section for the purpose of protecting the people and their property. In this behalf he superintended the construction of certain forts along

the Blue Mountains so that the terrorized inhabitants near by might fly to them for refuge. His letters to the Governors on the subject are numerous, and his descriptions of the sufferings and losses of the people are thrilling. They are published in the Colonial Records of Pennsylvania, and display not only the remarkable character of the man but his great devotion to the general welfare of the people.

Privilege of Court Baron.—Conrad Weiser acquired a large estate. Besides personal property, it consisted of several premises at Reading; also improved farming and other lands in Heidelberg township, in the district of territory beyond the mountains, and along the Susquehanna River. In Heidelberg he owned altogether nearly 900 acres of land. It included a tract of 347 acres with the privileges of a "Court Baron." This was conveyed to him in 1743, and was part of an extensive tract containing 5165 acres which was originally granted by the Penns to one John Page in 1735, and by the Letters Patent erected into a manor, called the "Manor of Plumton." Several other manors of this kind were set apart by the Penns in the territory now included in Berks County, as the "Manor of Tulpehocken," the "Manor of Ruscomb," and the "Manor of Penn's Mount," but they were not granted as such to any private individual.

The "Manor of Plumton" was the only one in Berks County which was sold with the right and power of constituting a "Court Baron;" but the manor was not held together and the Court was not established. A special power of this kind was contrary to the principles of Conrad Weiser. He had seen, heard and felt enough of a kindred power in the Palatinate; hence, we may infer, he would not assume and exercise the judicial rights with which he had been duly invested.

First Store-Stand at Reading.—The town of Reading was laid out by Thomas and Richard Penn, sons of William Penn, in 1748, and the next year they appointed Conrad Weiser as the first-named of three commissioners to dispose of the lots by public sale. Among those sold, Weiser himself purchased several prominent lots on Penn Square. In 1749 he took possession



of two of them which were situated next to the northeast corner of Callowhill street, (now Fifth), and by the next year had thereon a two-story stone building. It was the first building erected after the town-plan had been laid out. The accompanying illustration is a correct likeness. He established the business of hardware and general merchandise, and carried on the same successfully for some years; and it is believed that a tavern was conducted in connection with it.

This stand was the first business place at Reading and it has been used continuously for business purposes ever since, a period covering one hundred and forty years. Besides Weiser, the Keims and Stichters owned and occupied it during the entire period, excepting five years, the former from 1769 to 1842, and the latter from 1842 until now. Mark Bird purchased the property from the Weiser estate in 1764 and owned it until 1769, but it is more than likely that Nicholas Keim occupied it in that period also, for Bird was interested in the manufacture of iron extensively at Birdsboro, and Keim had moved from Oley to Reading before 1759.

The letters which Weiser addressed to the Governor of Pennsylvania on Provincial affairs, from 1755 to 1760, while at Reading, were written in this building. They describe the condition of things as affected by the French and Indian War. Previous to this war, many Indians, while on their way from the regions beyond the Blue Mountains through Reading to the seat of government at Philadelphia, stopped here for a while to pay their compliments to Weiser as a steadfast friend, and receive from him gifts of useful articles, or obtain them in exchange for articles of their own manufacture.

Death in 1760.—After the cessation of Indian hostilities in the county, Conrad Weiser became an invalid. His trials and exposures latterly had been too severe for his strength. But he continued, however, to officiate as the presiding judge of the courts until 1760; then he was obliged to retire to his farm in Heidelberg township adjoining the Tulpehocken road, nearly fourteen miles west from Reading, and there he died on the thirteenth day of July, of that year, in the sixty-third year of his age. He was buried in a family burying

ground on the farm near the dwelling house, and there his body has long since mouldered in the grave. A common sand-stone slab was erected at the head of the grave with a German inscription, which translated reads thus:—

This is the
Resting Place of the
highly honored CONRAD WEISER,
who was born 1696, the 2nd of November,
in Afstaet, in the County of Herrenberg, in the
Kingdom of Wittenberg, and died 1760,
the 13th day of July, reaching the
age of 63 years, 8 months
and 13 days.

There is an apparent error in the calculation of the age as to the days. It should be eleven days instead of thirteen. But in reality Conrad Weiser was only sixty-three years and eight months old at his death—eleven days having been added to the calendar in 1751 by Act of Parliament, when the year was made to begin on January first, in order to supply a loss of time that arose from the Julian theory of calculation of the revolutions of the earth.

REFLECTIONS.

In looking over the life of Conrad Weiser, with the facts before us that I have detailed, let us now see what reflections can be drawn from them for our guidance and profit.

Physical Endurance.—Physical endurance is the first prominent feature of this notable man. He came from a family of strength. Through a line of progenitors he was developed to undergo successfully the trials of toil and to bear the strain of perseverance until he ac-

complished what he undertook. Without strong bones, hardened muscles, sound lungs and pure blood he could not have endured the fatigue of his great journeys, nor resisted the penetrating cold of Winter and the enervating heat of Summer. Though traveling mostly on horseback, he reported—"it was enough to kill a man to come such a long and bad road, over hills, rocks, old trees and rivers, to fight through a cloud of vermin and all kinds of poisonous worms and creeping things."

All the immigrants, who settled in Berks County before its erection in 1752, were particularly required to be hardy men. Constant labor and rigid economy were absolutely necessary to improve its territory for sustenance and habitation. Fortunately for this section of Pennsylvania which the Palatinates came to occupy, they were so constituted; otherwise the trying missions in the interest of peace and safety could not have been undertaken, and the primitive condition of the rugged hills and rolling valleys of the country could not have been changed from a wilderness into profitable fields.

Conrad Weiser was a superior physical type of the men of his time. There was no one besides him in the Province capable of doing just what he did. Without his labors in behalf of the public welfare, the general condition of things in respect to the settlements, government, &c., in and for Berks County, would doubtless have been postponed for several decades. Now, after the lapse of over a century, it may be said that there are no missions through a wilderness for us to undertake, and our lands and dwelling-places are prepared for us; but there are still various enterprises before us that will require the quality of endurance, and we should be led to so direct our conduct as to be distinguished by its possession. Physical culture should receive our serious consideration, more especially since

mechanical agents like steam and electricity are making personal exertion more and more unnecessary every year.

Industry.—Next we find industry, and this we may regard as the foundation of his character. He laid this foundation well, first along the banks of the Hudson under grasping commissioners in burning tar and raising hemp, and then in the Schoharie Valley under his father at farming. More humble employments cannot be imagined. In them he learned to appreciate the necessity and also the power of labor in the production of value and the development of stability. He arrived in the Province of New York with the rudiments of a German education, but before he left it for Pennsylvania he also possessed the rudiments of an English education. This increased knowledge was the direct result of industry well directed; and experience as a farmer was gained in the same way. He delighted in study for the development of the understanding that it yielded, and he also delighted in labor for the material profit that it brought to him. This important secret of success he thoroughly understood by the time he came to be a man for himself; and upon settling in Tulpehocken he continued to display this quality in a most admirable manner to the great advantage of himself, of the community in which he lived, and of the entire Province of Pennsylvania which he served with signal success for nearly thirty years.

Courage.—Courage was a quality of equal prominence in his character. It came to him by inheritance and it never left him. His consent to live with the Indians, while still a boy, displays it in an unusual degree. He evidently possessed a spirit of adventure when he went to them, but, after passing through a rough experience

with many severe trials for eight months, he returned to his father's home with a development of physical strength and moral courage that won the admiration of the people round-about him. But his future life required all that he possessed. His journeys and missions demanded a heart that knew no fear. He went forward, not sneaking and hiding on the way to shoot and kill a race of men that were commonly believed to be the enemy of the English and German immigrants, but boldly like a man of high-born convictions, and negotiated with them, either to obtain a release of lands for a consideration, or to effect a settlement, or to demand the punishment of some of their own kin for offences against the law. Picturing before our minds the dangers and uncertainties incident to such undertakings, what kind of courage would we exhibit? How many, no, not how many, but who of us to-day would ride on horseback alone, through wilderness and forest for hundreds of miles in the interest of peace and the public good, and take the chances of returning alive? We possess courage, it is true, but it dwells too prominently in words, arguments and dissertations rather than in actions, and manifests itself too much in selfish interests and associations rather than in noble impulses for a whole community.

Experience.—Experience was also a prominent quality. Wherever he went and whatever he did, he showed qualification. He did not presume to do what he was not fitted for. His positions came to him, and they found him able and ready. While passing on from year to year since 1710, his employments and trials were in many respects common to other persons of his own time, but he profited by his experience in the several periods of his life until the close of his career when we find him in a better and more influential situation.

By studying the progressive course of his life, we are persuaded to say that divinity shaped his ends. In all prominent characters, it would seem that the same directing influence was constantly at work and the same qualities of body and mind were exhibited, apparently not recognized by them but nevertheless directing and controlling their destiny.

Domestic Relations.—At a mature age he established domestic relations of his own and became a devoted husband and father. His personal situation in this respect is one that we can seriously study. It was to him what a similar situation is to us, the basis of social life, and the principal inspiration of all noble endeavors.

Now each district supports a number of families, but the proportion to population could be largely increased, indeed, should be as a means not only of building up self-sustaining communities but of elevating the standard of life. As social affairs are directed and encouraged, there are certain customs flowing from clubs, secret societies and entertainments of various kinds, which are more or less detrimental to domestic happiness, because their influences are foreign to it and are constantly disposed to hinder its natural development. If the expenses incident to them were directed into its channel with the same devotion and energy, the social improvement of families would be readily apparent in many ways.

By studying the course that population has been taking in Berks County for the last thirty years, we shall find the tendency too much toward the centre or county-seat; and, also, that as the proportion to area of territory occupied in the outlying districts decreases, the distinctive families grow less in number, with no proportional increase in the centre. This tendency should

be reversed. The noblest aim of life is parentage with a superstructure distinguished for intellectual capability. It is conducive to the most elevating pleasures through the development of childhood into manhood and womanhood. A general movement of this kind would increase the public welfare to a large degree, and it would become more and more apparent as the various avenues of social existence showed more and more invigoration. The church is to be commended as an admirable factor whose principles and actions lead the people quietly and surely in this direction, but we inconsiderately encourage other factors which counteract her influences to a great extent. Our efforts and associations should therefore be so directed as to bring about a natural impulse to this end.

Man of Peace.—Conrad Weiser was eminently a man of peace. All his missions to the Indians and his interpretations for them had this end in view. This spirit gave him proper conceptions, and it also directed him in the political affairs that related to the early settlements and the general welfare of the country. Without it he could not have held the respect and confidence of the Indians, but with it he was enabled to be of great service to the Province. It is this spirit that is very serviceable to active and enterprising men of today, and enables them to accomplish purposes of a local as well as of a general nature that could not be accomplished with an opposite spirit.

For War when Necessary.—Yet, though for peace, he was also for war when war became a public necessity. But his spirit was not such as strove for conquest, ruin, extermination and death. It was rather to bring about order, confidence and safety, and in these respects he

was very successful. And though he covered only a comparatively small area of territory as a military commander, he distinguished himself nevertheless.

Religious Conviction.—As a man of religious convictions he stood out prominently among his fellow-citizens. His heart was ever willing and his feet were ever ready to assist the missionaries who came into this section of country to open and prepare the way of the Indians to Christian civilization. And he was always identified with some church or other along the Tulpehocken or the Schuylkill. By this we can infer that he held on to his belief in God which had been transmitted to him from his father. Though well-read and influential, he did not get beyond the people of his generation, nor did he presume to introduce notions and principles that were not fitted for them in their situation.

Local Individuality.—Conrad Weiser was a man who had an elevated idea of local rights. In my opinion this is one of his noblest qualities. It reveals more than any other quality his true character. He evidently possessed generous impulses for the political freedom of his neighbors and friends. He appreciated the necessity of building up and preserving personal interest in local affairs, and regarded this interest as the foundation of local rights. His actions in various ways tended towards local schools and churches, local roads and districts, and local opportunities, conveniences and improvements, and in these respects he accomplished a great deal for the general welfare.

By such a course of life he contributed a strong influence towards establishing a feeling for local identity and individuality. Thus he did for his community what certain men elsewhere of strong personality did for

their communities. The combined results throughout the different colonies eventually produced an aggregation of commonwealths, the natural culmination of which was free, representative, constitutional government. For this we can well cherish his name.

A careful study of his course enables us to see clearly that he labored for the convenience and welfare of local districts. It would be well if we did the same in our generation, especially in building up the distinctiveness of the family relation. Our policy should be to constantly encourage this relation, and then to lead each family into a separate home—not a tenement house too small for real comfort nor too large where many families are under one roof, but a dwelling-house and lot of ground with such proportions as would tend to create and preserve individuality in the several families. This is the true and lasting basis of a prosperous community, one in which there would appear, not a gradual decadence and loss of self-reliance, but a constant self-assertion through well-directed industry and economy, and a spirit of independence.

Public Service.—And he was also actively interested in local government. His suggestions, actions and exertions led to its improvement in various ways. He apparently deemed it his duty as a citizen to contribute his share of personal service towards the public welfare. He did not simply look on the condition of the people in an idle manner, however much inconvenience they suffered for want of a road, or a township, or a county, or a school, or a church, and let his neighbors start and work out a movement in this behalf until it was realized; but he co-operated, indeed, he did more than that, he took the lead, and developed the proper sentiments for local progress and convenience.

Every elector of to-day should show the same spirit and feel that he owes some service to the community in which he lives, particularly one of education and experience. By reflecting that he was educated, and also protected in the enjoyment of his life, property and associations, at the public expense, and that he participated in the general prosperity of his district for many years in succession, his conceptions of duty should be so quickened and elevated as to induce him to do some positive act in behalf of good government, not so much with a desire to fill an office himself as to see that a properly qualified person is selected to do so.

Our predecessors prepared the way for our political advancement and social elevation. Starting with Conrad Weiser's generation before 1760, when certain local rights and privileges were established, it would seem that we, in the fourth generation afterward, by an ordinary ratio of progression, should occupy a higher political position and be generally recognized for well-administered, representative government, with legislation in the interest of the people, and for public sentiments of liberty, justice and equality. But by comparing the status of the people of 1760 with that since 1860, I am constrained to say that we have not reached that degree of efficiency in administrative affairs, both local and general, which should have been shown in the course of progress; and the cause will be found to lie in our love of gain, ease and luxury through mechanical power.

Type of German Ancestry.—But the noble deeds of this man have been permitted to sleep silently in history for one hundred and thirty years without a just tribute of any kind set up in this community for the observation of men! Elsewhere, distinguished heroes, statesmen and representative men have been honored

with monuments. Why have we not done so for Conrad Weiser? What are our schools and churches, our government and enterprise, our relations of all kinds to us if they educate succeeding generations only to forget the actions and services of such a man? Let us signalize them in a manner that becomes our wealth, and freedom, and greatness. Let us make of him a type whereby we can symbolize the individuality of our German ancestry and through it show to mankind our appreciation of the principles that have made and preserved us until now a free and prosperous people. Let us erect here, at Reading, a monument out of Berks County granite, so that we can point to it with pride and say :—

TO
CONRAD WEISER,
A
GERMAN EMIGRANT FROM THE PALATINATE
WHO, BY
PATIENT PERSEVERANCE IN WELL-DOING
BECAME
A MAN FOR THE PEOPLE,
WHOSE
FRIENDSHIP WITH THE INDIANS
BROUGHT
PEACE TO OUR EARLY SETTLERS,
AND WHOSE
LABORS FOR PERSONAL RIGHTS
ESTABLISHED
FREE LOCAL GOVERNMENT.



“WEISER DAY” RECOMMENDED

BY THE

BOARD OF TRADE OF READING.

At a regular meeting of the Board of Trade, held on Thursday evening, September 7, 1893, upon the recommendation of the Committee on Municipal Affairs, the following preamble and resolution were adopted :

RESOLUTION.

WHEREAS, The public services of Conrad Weiser have so distinguished him as to lead the people of this community to regard him as “The first representative man of Berks County,” and as a type of the Pennsylvania Germans in this section of Pennsylvania.

AND WHEREAS, Conrad Weiser was the first man of business at Reading, and also an earnest advocate of education throughout the County of Berks, on which account we, as a Board of Trade, have introduced a movement looking to the erection of a suitable monument to him, and the school authorities of the city and county should unite with us in our undertaking; therefore—

Resolved, That we devote the November meeting, on Thursday, November 2nd, to the discussion of a project for a monument to Conrad Weiser, and that we request the directors at the County Teachers’ Institute during its next annual convention, and also the Board of School Controllors of Reading, to set aside a part of said day for the study of his life and character by the teachers and scholars—the day to be commonly known as “Weiser Day,” it being the anniversary of his birth.



SCHOOL HISTORY OF BERKS COUNTY,

BY
MORTON L. MONTGOMERY.

The School History of Berks County was published in 1889 upon the recommendation of the county and city superintendents and certain advanced teachers of the common schools, for the purpose of enabling the children to learn the geography and history of their own county. Immediately after its publication a number of the more prominent districts introduced it as a supplemental reader; and, each year since then, additional districts have done likewise. Those educators, who recommended its use at the beginning, are now, after a trial of several years, more highly satisfied of its utility and value in local schools.

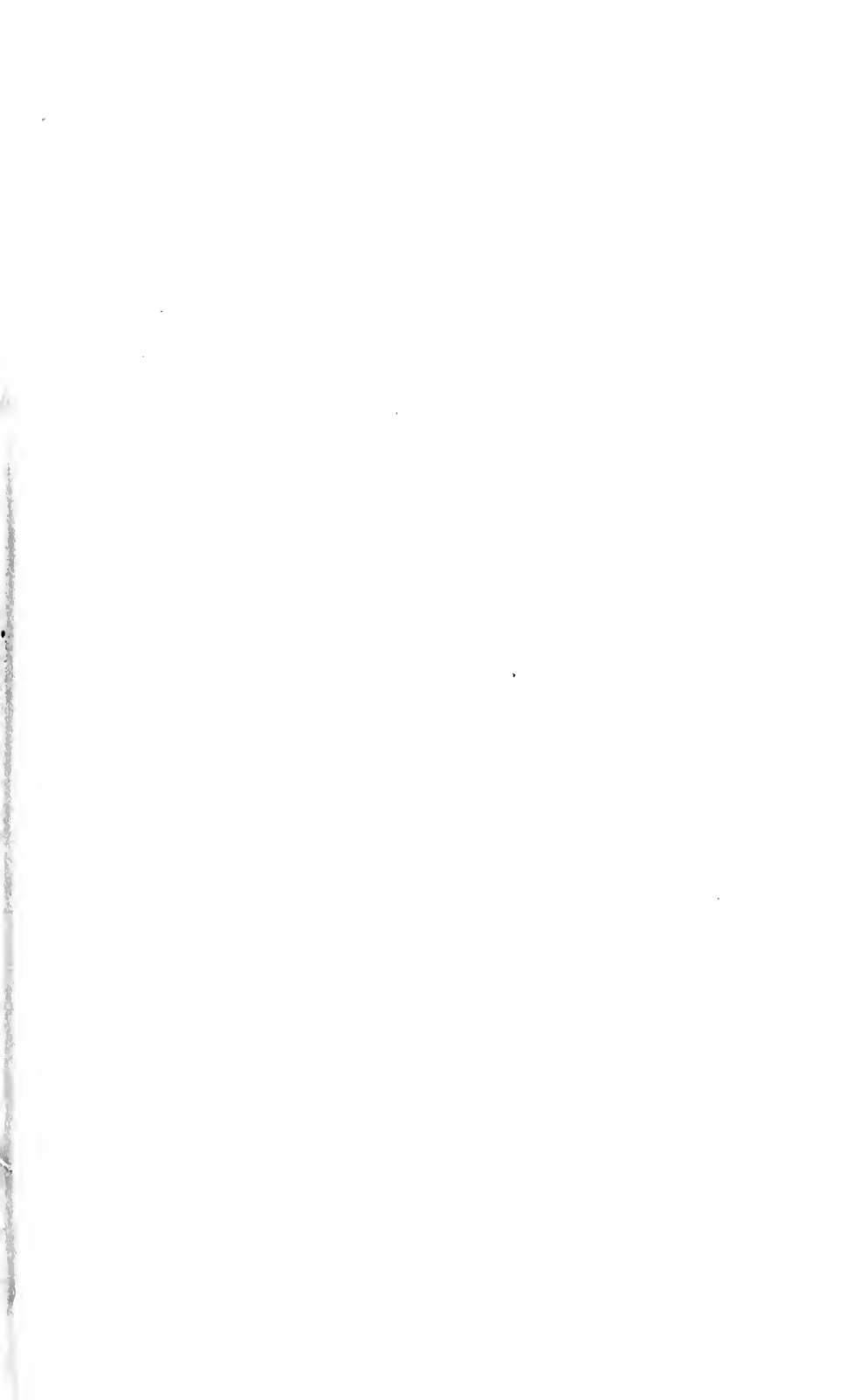
A child, in studying the contents of the volume, exercises the perceptive faculties more than the imaginative. It obtains knowledge through perception, and not the imagination, because it can see and thus grow into understanding; but it cannot correctly exercise the imagination without comprehension.

The arrangement of the book is simple. The subjects are so treated as to be within the grasp of any scholar who can read intelligently; and the information, though mostly of a local nature, can be made useful in various ways. There is an increasing demand for this information in our daily affairs, as shown by the newspapers. The conversation and interest of the great majority of the people are almost wholly on local topics.

The volume is a small octavo of 300 pages, and the contents comprise the following chapters:

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|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1.—GEOGRAPHY. | 7.—LABOR AND INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS. |
| 2.—INDIANS. | 8.—MILITARY PERIODS. |
| 3.—EARLY SETTLERS. | 9.—TOWNSHIPS. |
| 4.—ERECTION OF COUNTY AND SUBDIVISIONS. | 10.—BOROUGHES. |
| 5.—GOVERNMENT. | 11.—READING. |
| 6.—EDUCATION. | 12.—CENSUS. |

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